

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

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INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SAN

USLO PEKING

CINCEUR

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

S E C R E T HONG KONG 4664

EXDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MASS CH ET SO

SUBJ: PRC POLICY ON ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA DISPUTE

REF: ADDIS ABABA 4228

SUMMARY: CHINA WISHES TO AVOID ENTANGLEMENT IN CONFLICT BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE THIRD WORLD WHERE ITS OWN SECURITY IS NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED. THIS PRINCIPLE, WE BELIEVE, WILL WORK TO KEEP THE PRC OUT OF MAJOR PARTICIPATION IN THE ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA DISPUTE. THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING THE PRINCIPLE PATRON OF ETHIOPIA WOULD BE DUBIOUS AND THE RISKS SUBSTANTIAL. POLARIZATION OF THE HORN INTO PRO-PEKING AND PRO-MOSCOW CAMPS WOULD RISK THE PRC'S INVOLVEMENT IN SOMALIA, CEMENT THE SOVIET FOOTHOLD, UPSET CHINA'S BROAD UNITED FRONT APPROACH TO THE THIRD WORLD, FRIGHTEN SOME AFRICANS AND PROBABLY IRRITATE MANY ARABS. THE UNCERTAIN POLITICAL SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA, THE APPARENTLY SIZABLE COSTS IN SUPPLYING THE IEG WHAT IT DESIRES AND SOVIET STRATIGIC AD-

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VANTAGE IN THE AREA ARE OTHER FACTORS WHICH REINFORCE

CHINESE CAUTION. IF ASKED BY THE IEG FOR A MAJOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, CHINA MIGHT AGREE TO SUPPLY LIGHT ARMS AND SOME MILITARY EQUIPMENT BUT WE BELIEVE IT IS UNLIKELY TO PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT QUANTITIES OF TANKS OR JET AIRCRAFT. SHOULD AN ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA CONFLICT OCCUR, THE PRC WOULD PROBABLY ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN ITS POSITION WITH BOTH COUNTRIES, ENCOURAGE OAU OR UN INVOLVEMENT, AND BLAME THE SOVIETS FOR STIRRING UP THE TROUBLE. END SUMMARY.

1. EXCEPT IN CASES WHERE ITS OWN SECURITY INTERESTS ARE INVOLVED THE PRC CLEARLY WISHES TO AVOID ENTANGLEMENT IN CONFLICTS WITHIN THE THIRD WORLD. OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS IN AFRICA, CHINA HAS CONCENTRATED ON ASSISTING THE BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AGAINST COMMONLY AGREED COLONIALIST ENEMIES WHILE ADVOCATING AFRICAN UNITY AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND SUPERPOWER HEGEMONISM.

2. WAR BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA WOULD BE AN UNWELCOME DEVELOPMENT FOR BOTH AFRICAN AND THIRD WORLD UNITY. BUT AN ARMS RACE IN THE HORN AND ITS POLARIZATION INTO PRO-PEKING AND PRO-MOSCOW CAMPS WOULD PROBABLY BE SEEN AS AN EVEN MORE DANGEROUS COURSE DIRECTLY INVOLVING CHINA. THE HOTTER THE ARMS RACE, THE MORE LIKELY THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR AND THE GREATER THE COMMITMENT OF CHINA'S PRESTIGE ON AN UNCERTAIN OUTCOME. REFLECTING PEKING'S DESIRE THUS FAR TO REMAIN UNINVOLVED HAS BEEN THE LACK OF ANY MENTION IN CHINESE MEDIA OF ETHIOPIAN-SOMALIAN FRICTION.

3. PEKING IS DISPLEASED WITH THE SOVIET MILITARY ROLE IN SOMALIA AND IN PARTICULAR WITH THE FACILITIES WHICH ARE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE SOVIET NAVY AT BERBERA. THIS IS MADE CLEAR IN FREQUENT CHINESE CRITICISM OF THE SOVIETS FOR HAVING OBTAINED BY "CAJOLERY AND PRESSURE" MILITARY FACILITIES IN UNNAMED COUNTRIES ALONG THE PERIPHERY OF THE INDIAN OCEAN. NEVERTHELESS THE PRC HAS ALSO PROVIDED SUBSTANTIAL ECONOMIC AID TO SOMALIA, AND LARGE-SCALE CHINESE MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR ETHIOPIA WOULD RISK THIS INVESTMENT AND ALLOW THE SOVIETS THE OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN THEIR POSITION IN MOGADISCIO AND THUS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. IN ADDITION, POLARIZATION WOULD THREATEN TO SPREAD. SOME AFRICANS WOULD PRE-SECRET

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SUMABLY BE CONCERNED WITH A SHARP MILITARY MANIFESTATION IN THEIR CONTINENT OF THE THE SINO-SOVIET CONFLICT. AND MANY ARAB STATES, INCLUDING THE SUDAN, MIGHT ALSO BE UPSET WITH THE TURN OF EVENTS.

4. THE UNCERTAIN POLITICAL SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA HAS NOT BEEN MENTIONED IN THE PRC PRESS, BUT THE UNCERTAINTY MUST ALSO REINFORCE CHINESE CAUTION. MOREOVER, PEKING, WE BELIEVE, IS NOW

TRYING TO HOLD DOWN ITS OWN PROBABLY ESCALATING DEFENSE COSTS AND MOST CHINESE LEADERS WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO UNDERTAKE THE SIZABLE COMMITMENT WHICH WOULD APPARENTLY BE NECESSARY TO SATISFY THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE IEG. FINALLY THE SOVIETS ENJOY A MARKED STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE IN THE AREA OF THE HORN AND CHINESE PLANNERS WOULD PROBABLY CONSIDER IT ANOTHER EXAMPLE WHERE DISTANT WATER SHOULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO PUT OUT FIRE.

5. IF ASKED BY THE IEG FOR A MAJOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, CHINA MIGHT RESPOND ONLY WITH OFFERS OF ADDITIONAL ECONOMIC AID. CONCEIVABLY, IT COULD ALSO AGREE TO SUPPLY LIGHT ARMS AND SOME MILITARY EQUIPMENT. WE BELIEVE IT IS UNLIKELY, HOWEVER THAT THE PRC WOULD PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT QUANTITIES OF TANKS, JET AIRCRAFT OR OTHER HEAVY EQUIPMENT. SHOULD AN ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA CONFLICT OCCUR, THE PRC WOULD PROBABLY TRY TO MAINTAIN ITS POSITION WITH BOTH COUNTRIES AND SUPPORT OAU OR UN INVOLVEMENT TO STOP THE FIGHTING. PEKING WOULD HOWEVER, VERY LIKELY LEAN TOWARD ETHIOPIA IF ONLY TO THE EXTENT OF MAKING ATTACKS ON MOSCOW FOR HAVING STIRRED UP THE WAR.

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